



Chambers's Journal

SIXTH SERIES.

SECULAR PROPHECIES.

LIKE a good many other things, prophecies of all sorts are subjected to the 'explaining away' process. They are coincidences, deductions—obvious to a thinking mind—from given data, 'lucky shots' wrapped in such ambiguous and mystifying verbiage that they may mean anything. To this last category belong doubtless many of the prophecies attributed to Merlin, to Nostradamus, to Mother Shipton, and others, following the lines laid down in the Sibylline utterances. But, on the other hand, it must be admitted that there are prophecies recorded which are quite 'to the purpose—easy things to understand.' Historians tell us that the Emperor Diocletian had his future glory foretold by a Druidess when he was but a simple soldier; one of the same weird sisterhood warned Alexander Severus of his approaching fate. On the day before the Red King met his tragic death in the New Forest, the monk Fulcherd, preaching at Gloucester, used the significant phrase, 'The libertine shall not always rule: the bow of divine vengeance is bent on the reprobate, and the swift arrow is taken from the quiver, ready to wound.' When the Dean and Chapter of Thetford were seeking approval in the *Sortes Biblicæ* for the election of their bishop, the passage indicated was: 'Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.' They recognised the appropriateness of the rede when the profligate Losinga was forced upon them. Losinga, informed perhaps of the ominous occurrence, determined, half in mockery, to test the *Sortes* for himself. The result was even more conclusive. 'Friend, wherefore art thou come?' was the solemn passage that confronted him; and rumour has it that from that day he became a pattern bishop. 'Holy men at their death have good inspiration,' we know on the authority of pretty Nerissa. The epithet scarcely applies to William the Conqueror, that 'stark' man to friend and foe; but it was either an inspiration or paternal insight which made him prophesy

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his third son's future. 'What good is this money to me?' asked the discontented Henry. 'Be patient, my son,' was the prescient reply, 'and thou shalt inherit the fortunes of thy brothers.' Unconsciously, doubtless, the Conqueror was but confirming the still older rune of Merlin, who foretold the reign of Beauclerc. 'After two dragons the Lion of Justice shall come, at whose roaring the Gallic towers and island serpents shall tremble.' If to us of to-day the prophecy does not seem too perspicuous, it is historical fact that his subjects considered it to refer to Henry I.—just as in the next reign but one Eleanor of Aquitaine was identified with Merlin's 'double eagle,' that 'destructive eagle who should rejoice in her third nestling,' her favourite Richard. Mage Merlin, too, was credited with foretelling the birth of Edward of Carnarvon and the devolution of the crown to the Lancastrians.

Peter the Hermit, speaking three days before the Feast, prophesied that before Ascension Day John would have ceased to reign; and within the time named the king had yielded the imperial crown of England to the papal legate. Shakespeare has made us familiar with the prophecy on which Henry IV. relied—namely, that he should die in Jerusalem—and with its fulfilment in his decease in the Jerusalem Chamber; and a goodly list might be made of oracular utterances which in their accomplishment have 'kept the word of promise to the ear and broken it to the sense.' Pope Sylvester received a similar assurance, and he died in a church named after the Holy City in Rome; the Duke of Somerset—this incident, too, is recorded by Shakespeare—had been warned by Jourdain to fear danger 'where castles mounted stand,' and he died at an inn at St Albans whose sign, the Castle, was hung on high. The famous Michael Scot prophesied that Frederick II. would die near the 'iron gates in a town named after Flora.' It was thought that this pointed to Florence, but the emperor died in the castle of Fiorentino, in a room built on the site of an old gate of which the iron stanchions

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still remained. The same famous wizard, it may be mentioned, is said to have foretold the exact manner of his own death—by a blow from a stone received in church; and one day when he was hearing mass a stone ornament from the roof became dislodged, and, falling on his head, killed him on the spot. It is believed to have been in consequence of a vagrant prophecy that Henry V. was so anxious that the birth of his heir should take place anywhere but at Windsor. When he was informed that Catharine had neglected to comply with his request, with the result that her accouchement took place at the inhibited castle, he assumed the mantle of prophecy himself:

I, Henry born at Monmouth,
Shall small time reign and much get;
But Henry of Windsor shall long reign and lose all;

and it must be admitted that the rune was amply fulfilled. Perhaps it was intelligent prescience rather than prophetic afflatus which made this same Henry of Windsor declare of young Henry of Richmond when quite a youth, 'This pretty boy will wear the garland in peace for which we so sinfully contend;' but, if so, it was prescience of a very high order, considering the position of dynastic affairs when the words were spoken.

Then there was the prophecy, which Shakespeare makes 'false, fleeting, perjured Clarence' refer to, that Edward IV.'s issue should be disinherited by some one whose name began with 'G.' The prediction was, as is well known, fulfilled by Richard of Gloucester; though, according to the tragedy, Clarence himself was thought by the king to be pointed at, his Christian name being George. Of Richard Crookback, too, a prophecy is recorded. Before the battle of Bosworth he rode out of Leicester in all the pomp and circumstance of war. As he crossed the bridge his foot struck against a wooden projection. Whereupon a beggar by the wayside was heard to say, 'His head shall strike against that very pile as he returns to-night;' and when the dead body of the vanquished king was brought back to Leicester, flung across the saddle of Rouge Sanglier, the swaying head struck against that piece of wood.

In the reign of Henry VIII., Friar Hopkins prophesied that the king would return with glory from France, but that the king of Scotland, should he cross the border, would never revisit his dominions. A more awesome prediction with regard to Henry is credited to Friar Peyto. In a sermon preached when the king's church spolia-tion was at its height, the preacher boldly compared the terrible Henry to Ahab, and declared that as it was with the Jewish monarch so should it be with him: the dogs should lick his blood. And it came to pass that when the 'bloat-king' had passed to his account, his coffin rested for a night, unwatched, 'among the broken walls of Sion.' Owing to the rough journey, or

the condition of the body, the coffin had burst, and when the bearers came for it in the morning, beneath the trestles were dogs licking up the blood that had leaked through.

The mention of James of Scotland in connection with Flodden recalls the fact that a more noteworthy seer than Nicholas Hopkins had foretold the disaster. Thomas the Rhymer—True Thomas of Ercildoune—had, more than two hundred years before, seen the banners wave 'by Flodden's high and heathery side,' and an arrow pierce the Scottish king. The Rhymer is said to have foretold, too, the death of Alexander III. by a fall from his horse in 1286, the defeat of the Scots at Pinkie, their victory at Bannockburn, and, more explicitly, as rendered by Sir Walter Scott, that:

A French queen shall bear the son
Shall rule all Britain to the sea;
He of the Bruce's blood shall come
As near as is the ninth degree.

Of that French queen herself, the ill-fated Mary, Queen of Scots, we are told that an equally famous seer foreshadowed her tragic fate. When she was quite a child, her mother, Mary of Guise, took her to the great Nostradamus. 'There is blood on that beautiful brow,' said the sage, and that blood has become one of the most lurid blots on the canvas of history. One of the hapless Mary's most inveterate opponents, John Knox, has also been credited with prophetic inspiration; but his utterances seem prompted rather by shrewd political insight. It was at any rate a daring forecast which he made when imprisoned in Rochelle, that within three years he would be preaching in St Giles's, Edinburgh; and the fact that he foresaw the deaths of Maitland and Kirkcaldy, and that he solemnly warned Murray of the fate that awaited him at Linlithgow, goes far to explain his reputation.

Nostradamus, before mentioned, stands high in the ranks of secular prophets, though his predictions are often expressed in so vague a way as to detract somewhat from the certainty of their meaning. He is said to have prophesied the death of the Duc de Montmorency under Louis XI., the deaths of Louis XVI., his queen and dauphin, and the empire of Napoleon. Amongst his most successful inspirations were those relating to the death of Henry II., of our own Charles I., and of the attack on religion at the Revolution. Concerning the first, he wrote:

Le bon jeune le vieux surmontera
En champ bellique par singulier duel,
Dans cage d'or les yeux lui crevera,
Deux plaies une, puis mourir: mort cruelle.

The prophecy concerning Charles I. is contained in the following lines:

Gand et Bruxelles marcheront contre Anvers,
Senat de Londres mettront à mort leur roi;

while that relating to the persecution of the Church is precise even to dates. It was to last

'jusques à l'an mille sept cent nonante deux, que l'on cuidera estre une renovation de siècle.' The French Republic, it will be remembered, dated its ordonnances from the 22d of September 1792. As an example of his vague rhapsodies which have been honoured as prophecies may be instanced the quatrain which was gravely held to predict the blessings the world in general, and Great Britain in particular, were to derive from William of Orange:

Né sous les ombres journée nocturne,
Sera en gloire et souverain bonté:
Fera renaître le sang de l'antique urne,
Et changera en or le siècle d'airain.

The prince was born in a mourning chamber, the 'ancient blood' was renewed by his descent from Charlemagne, and the remainder of the prophecy was common form of adulation. The explanation seems as ingenious as the text.

Mention has been made of the *Sortes Biblicæ*; the *Sortes Virgilianæ* (in which not the Bible but Virgil's poems were opened at random, and a passage selected by pricking the page without choosing) were another sort of impersonal prophet much resorted to. Of the many instances recorded may be mentioned that of their consultation by Charles I. He was at Carisbrooke, and, *pour passer le temps*, Lord Falkland suggested that the ill-starred monarch should consult the Virgilian oracle. The lines indicated were from Dido's curse in the Fourth Book of the *Æneid*. As given in Cowley's translation, the lines are as follows:

By a bold people's stubborn arms oppress,
Forced to forsake the land he once possessed,
Torn from his dearest son, let him in vain
Seek help, and see his friends unjustly slain;
Let him to base, unequal terms submit
In hopes to save his crown, yet lose both it
And life at once; untimely let him die
And on an open stage unburied lie.

Dryden's translation (line 882 *et seq.*) is scarcely as effective; but it may be mentioned that in the last verse 'barren sand' is substituted for 'open stage,' and that this agrees with one of the traditions relating to the obsequies of 'The White King.' The story goes on to say that Lord Falkland, by way of proving the folly of thinking twice of such 'warnings,' himself questioned futurity as interpreted by the pages of the Mantuan Swan. Still more ominous was his venture, for the passage indicated by the interrogant pin was Evander's lament over Pallas:

O Pallas, thou hast failed thy plighted word
To fight with caution, nor to tempt the sword.

I warned thee, but in vain, for well I knew
What perils youthful ardour would pursue.

O curst essay of arms! disastrous doom!
Prelude of bloody fields and fights to come!

With regard to the former of these incidents, another account makes the prince who thus consulted Virgil the Prince of Wales, then a fugitive in France, and his companion in the harmless necromancy Abraham Cowley, whose rendering of the passage has been given.

To refer at length to instances of these prophetic utterances, or coincidences, would occupy too great a space; a mere mention of some of the most familiar must suffice. A Spanish monk foretold the death of Henri Quatre of France; Coysel predicted that Coligny would be killed by the Duc de Guise, and that before a certain date the Duc de Beaufort would escape from Vincennes, as mentioned in *Vingt Ans Après*. Perhaps one of the most remarkable forecasts or prophecies was that published in the *Mercurius Britannicus* for 1656, which predicted the Fire of London in the very year in which it occurred.

No reference to secular prophecies would be complete which omitted mention of those strange, well-authenticated instances of victims when at the point of death summoning their persecutors to meet them before the divine tribunal within a specified time. Between them Clement V. and Philip IV. procured the condemnation of Molay, the Grandmaster of the Templars, to the stake. As he was led to execution Molay cited his persecutors to appear before God's throne, the king within forty weeks and the Pope within forty days. Within those respective times both died. Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes, condemned to death Fra Moriale. When he had pronounced the sentence the culprit summoned the judge to meet death himself within the month, and within the month Rienzi was assassinated. In 1575 Nanning Koppezoon, a Roman Catholic tortured to death during the religious strife in the Netherlands, recanted his extorted confession when on the way to the scaffold. A clergyman, Jurian Epeszoon, tried to drown his voice by clamorous prayer. The victim summoned him to meet him within three days at the bar of God, and Epeszoon went home to his house and died within that time. While at the stake Wishart openly denounced Cardinal Beaton: 'He shall be brought low, even to the ground, before the trees which have supplied these fagots have shed their leaves.' The trees were but in the bravery of their May foliage when the bleeding body of the cardinal was hung by his murderers over the battlements of St Andrews.

AN ONION CONTEST.

By JAMES BURNLEY.



It was the time of onions, and we smelt them as we passed. Every greengrocery store was piled up with gigantic specimens of the strong-scented esculent which Falstaff so strenuously objected to assuage his hunger with. In the hotels every meal was accompanied by huge dishes of onions, and those 'native and to the manner born' consumed them with a relish that bespoke not only healthy appetites but a decided taste for this most odorous of vegetables.

The time was towards the end of the month of March, the place the city of Pittsburgh, to which metropolis of iron and steel I had wandered in quest of industrial knowledge, in the acquiring of which the good offices of Mr Andrew Carnegie had greatly helped me. But high above the roar of the furnaces, the belching of smoke, and the sound of the mighty hammers as they crushed and moulded the molten metal, there arose the pungent scent of a continuous feast of onions. It was onions, onions, all the way, all the day, and all the night; and the only possible escape from an oniony martyrdom was to become an onion-devourer one's self. This was the refuge I resorted to; and after a time, when the first stages of nausea and revulsion had been surmounted, I succeeded in so permeating my system with the aroma of the onion that I was able to mix with the eager, pushing business crowds without having my organ of smell made unhappy, for with onions as with many other things it is a case of *similia similibus curantur*.

In England, Hodge is the great consumer of onions, along with his bread and cheese, and the noses of the 'quality' turn up in haughty disdain when the scent of the raw onion is in the air; but in Pittsburgh there is no class distinction involved in the consumption of the vegetable; high and low, rich and poor, millionaire and beggar, have the onion craving, and no question of vulgarity arises in connection with it. I freely confess to a liking for the onion in its cooked form, as an aid to its betters—a delicate hint of it introduced amongst more dominant features of the gastronomic art being at once appetising and delicious; and I know that the redoubtable Soyer made much of it, and that it was far from being scorned by Brillat-Savarin; but to be thrown into sudden contact with it in its raw form, to smell millions of it, and to see everybody eating it in its natural state, without any addition or treatment except such as could be obtained from a dip into the salt with every bite, was rather disconcerting, and, as might be expected, frequently drew tears from my eyes.

It was not to be wondered at that in such an atmosphere there should be found men who prided themselves on their prowess as onion-eaters, and that in the season men should come forward to challenge each other in onion-eating. Such a contest took place while I was in Pittsburgh, and it struck me as being so novel—that is, from a British point of view—that I was tempted to make one of the spectators, and now propose to relate how the affair was carried out.

The contest had been arranged a month beforehand, and the contestants, like aspirants for other championships, had employed the interval in training for the meeting. The names of the men were John Raab and John Weidner. The former, when he had time to spare from onion-eating, ran a pair of rolls at Spang & Chalfant's mill; while the latter devoted his days to the hauling of groceries. The function took place at the rooms of the Madison Square Club, in Concord Street, Allegheny, and drew together such a crowd of members and friends as had seldom assembled there. They were mostly residents of the 'Dutch-town' quarter, and showed an enthusiastic interest in the proceedings, both men having a large following of backers. Nor was the company confined to the sterner sex; Hans Breitmann likes to have his wife, his sisters, and his daughters around him even at an onion-eating 'barty'; so the cheery voices of a score or two of fraus and fräuleins mingled with the harsher tongues of their men-folk, and a very strange babel they made of it. There gathered the Schneiders and the Hartmanns, the Müllers and the Schanbachers, the Grimms and the Zollers, the Minchens and the Muntzers; and altogether it was a very jolly affair. They occupied the earlier portion of the evening, as well as the intervals between the onion-eating rounds later on, with dance and song and joviality, after the manner of their nationality. There was a fair sprinkling of Americans present, too, workers in iron and steel and coal, from whom the grime of toil never seems wholly to depart; and the lager beer was copiously served round to all and sundry. By ten o'clock, the time fixed for the opening of the contest, the assembly was in a swelter of excitement.

I ought to have mentioned that the name of the contestant Raab had been kept a profound secret until the night of the match, and much speculation had been indulged in concerning the identity of the unknown. The competition came about in this way: Weidner had long been regarded as the champion onion-swallower of the club. Indeed, he was popularly supposed to stand unequalled in the art. John came of a family of

onion-eaters. His father and mother had been famous for their capacity in that line, so John had been inured to onion-eating from his youth up, and every night before going to bed ate from three to half-a-dozen to assist his slumbers. If he awoke in the night he would get up and despatch a few more onions, which he always kept by his bedside ready for emergencies. With a reputation like this, it seemed a reproach to Weidner's friends and neighbours that an opportunity should not be created for him to give some public demonstration of his special ability. Accordingly, one night at the club, Weidner's friend, John Metz, a patrol-wagon man, made the bold announcement that he would back Weidner to eat onions against any man in the world. To this challenge one Amos Lang, a detective in the police force, made answer that he would produce 'an unknown' who would 'eat onions all around Weidner.' Whereupon a match was made for twenty dollars a side, and betting became very free, considerably over two hundred dollars being wagered on each side.

The contest took place in a large room on the second floor of the club-house. There was a piano in one corner, and on the walls hung coloured lithographic portraits of the Emperor William, Bismarck, Goethe, Von Moltke, and Mr McKinley. In the centre of the room was a round table, by the side of which stood a number of empty chairs. The remaining space was occupied by the exciting, gabbling, smoking, drinking, onion-scented crowd of expectant sight-seers.

A tremendous cheer went up when the clock struck ten and in marched the judges and the referee, followed a minute or two afterwards by Weidner and his backers. Then there was a short lull. All looked for the coming of 'the unknown,' and wondered who it could be. When at last John Raab and his supporters came striding into the room there was a great commotion, for Raab turned out to be almost as well known as his rival, though few perhaps had suspected him of any special gift in the way of onion-eating—yet it transpired later that Raab had been raised on an onion-farm and had lived among onions for years. Weidner took his seat on one side of the table, Raab taking the chair immediately opposite. The judges and the referee also sat facing each other. On a side-table was a pile of onions beside a pair of scales, presided over by a beery German, who seemed proud of the honour of having to weigh out the allotted portions of onions to the contestants.

Weidner and Raab were ready. Weidner, a rosy-cheeked, plump, smiling fellow of about thirty-five, looked round with an easy confidence; while Raab, a hungry-looking, ferret-eyed, slim man, a few years older, seemed perturbed of conscience and ill at ease, for a reason that was soon apparent. The onions—which were of the

big red variety, the strongest kind known—had been divested of their outer skins, and weighed out, two pounds to each man, and placed in front of Raab and Weidner, when a shrill, clarion-like voice sounded a wild, protesting note from the far end of the room. John Raab's pale face turned paler. He recognised the voice of his wife, and for a moment it appeared as if the contest would not be able to proceed. She forced her way to the table, and angrily insisted on her husband 'quitting;' but in spite of her threats and denunciations he clung to his post, and eventually the irascible lady was persuaded to leave the room, and she refused to return, doubtless much to Raab's comfort. His mother-in-law stuck to him, however, as mothers-in-law sometimes will, and did all she could to compensate for her daughter's opposition, by cheering vociferously every time Raab crunched his teeth into a fresh onion.

Weidner's pile comprised nine onions, Raab's eight. The senior judge read out the rules of the contest before the eating began. The onions were to be eaten raw; the men were permitted to eat with salt or without, as they pleased; and they were at liberty to consume as much beer and rye bread as they desired while they went along. A sliced loaf and enough salt to have pickled a pig were placed within easy reach of the principals, and Raab ordered two glasses of lager and Weidner one.

All was now in order for the start, and time was called. The giggling of the women was suspended, and the men held their breaths. The contest was to be in rounds of ten minutes each, with five minutes rest between. Each man seized an onion, and the battle was on. Weidner cut his onions in quarters with a knife, and dipped them in salt. Raab smashed his with a blow of the fist, and also helped himself freely to salt. The greatest excitement prevailed, and there was a good deal of betting, the odds being five to four on Weidner all through the first round. Weidner ate slowly but steadily, while Raab attacked his onions as though they were his natural fodder. The round ended with honours even, each man having disposed of four onions. The men spent the five minutes' interval out of the room.

When time was called for the second round, Raab entered with two glasses of beer in his hands, and Weidner with one—and they got to work again, but by no means with their original avidity. Raab was the fresher of the two, and, perceiving signs of weakening in his opponent, began to chaff him, boasting that he could easily eat two onions to Weidner's one—a remark that drew forth a frantic cheer of approval from Raab's mother-in-law. But Raab himself was much slower than in the initial round, and both showed a greater desire for 'extras' than at the outset. Raab fortified himself with a whole loaf of bread

and four glasses of beer during this round, but Weidner contented himself with a loaf of rye and one glass of lager only. The referee drank more than both the contestants put together, but then he wasn't eating onions. At the end of the round Raab had four onions left, and Weidner three and a half; but the latter's onions were larger than his rival's.

When time was called for the third round Raab was outside drinking a few more beers, and did not show up promptly, whereat Weidner's friends were for claiming the victory for their man on the ground of the other's default; but the referee reminded them that the match was for the man who could eat the most onions, and declared that Weidner must remain and eat more than Raab had eaten before the award could be given to him. At this Weidner started on to get a safe lead, but before he had taken a couple of bites Raab came in with a couple of glasses of beer in his hands. Both men now ate rapidly for a short time, but Weidner showed signs of decided 'grogginess.' Raab chuckled. 'They wanted an unknown,' he said; 'well, they have got one.' Towards the end of the round both men were in distress, and handled their onions in anything but an affectionate manner. Weidner was scarcely able to swallow, and Raab, who had put away

seven glasses of beer during the round, found his teeth hesitating and uncertain.

When the fourth round was called Weidner failed to come up; but Raab, who had probably indulged in copious libations during the five minutes' interval, sat down as if his second appetite had come to him, and avowed himself ready to tackle a whole year's crop of onions. Weidner's friends then came forward and announced that their man had thrown up the sponge, and Raab was awarded the prize of victory amid much cheering, his devoted mother-in-law honouring him with a gushing embrace. Raab had eaten twenty-four ounces of onions to his rival's twenty-two ounces. Weidner was disconsolate; the humiliation of defeat weighed heavily upon him, and he almost wept as he declared that it was the first time in his life that his stomach had gone back on him.

As I took my departure the girls were preparing for further revelries. The piano was set tinkling, and the last sounds I heard were those of uproarious laughter and the shuffling of many feet. The *fräuleins* had entered into the spirit of the contest so thoroughly that they were arranging an eating-match on their own account before I left, with bananas, instead of onions, as the commodities to be devoured.

QUAINT SOUTH AFRICAN CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS.

By LEWIS GOLDING.



As we become more enlightened, that peculiar tendency inherent in every one of us—no matter what may be our creed, nationality, age, or sex—towards a belief in supernatural agency grows less assertive and apparent. Still, with all our boasted knowledge, we cannot entirely extinguish the spark of superstition, though we may deny its existence and endeavour to conceal its presence from each other. For instance, even to-day many people could not walk through a deserted graveyard without experiencing that indefinable feeling of physical and mental discomfort colloquially termed 'goose-flesh.' Others, again, can never sit down to table with twelve companions without dreading the consequences, or at least without endeavouring to restore their own peace of mind by maintaining that they disbelieve in thirteen being an unlucky number.

If, then, we, the descendants of generations of cultured and enlightened ancestors, still retain some small instinctive horror of things occult, is it to be wondered at that savages of all nations, grovelling in the depths of ignorance and superstition, descend at times to the perpetra-

tion of any brutality, any absurdity, in order to ward off the possible fatal results of a glance from the 'evil eye,' or in an attempt at propitiating offended spirits—malignant or otherwise?

The South African native, in particular, is a strangely superstitious individual. Anything unusual or out of the ordinary course of events is considered by him to be the precursor of some grievous calamity; and such phenomena as an eclipse of sun or moon are viewed with the utmost consternation and awe. In brief, everything that is inexplicable to him is at once termed *tagati*—that is, witchcraft—and attributed to the handiwork of some powerful but malicious 'medicine-man.'

Quite recently a native woman was arrested in Matabeleland by the white authorities on the grave charge of infanticide. At her trial, a day or two later, she was asked to state her motive for so inhumanly murdering her offspring. Without hesitation she replied that she had 'put away' her child because it was a monstrosity, and, as such, unfit to cumber the earth. When pressed for an explanation showing in what way the child was a freak of nature, the woman said

that, contrary to *native* infantile teething-law—she knew nothing of the European—the child had cut the two milk-teeth in the upper jaw first: proof positive that the infant was accursed. It was only the woman's palpable ignorance that saved her from the undesirable attentions of the local 'Monsieur de Paris;' but the long term of penal servitude which the unfortunate woman is now undergoing will doubtless teach her and her friends that the white rulers of the country do not countenance the indiscriminate slaughter of little children, no matter how malformed they may be or how unusual were the circumstances attending their advent into the world.

For generations past the birth of twins has been regarded by Zulu women as a most grievous and regrettable calamity. Doubtless many European nations will contend that the unsophisticated native women are by no means unique in this respect. True; but the reasons for a display of disgust at a 'double event' are in each case owing to a very different cause—the European mother only taking into account the extra care and attention entailed; while the native, attaching no importance whatsoever to this matter, is only overcome and terrorised by the possible punishment which will be inflicted upon her for having so flagrantly insulted and offended some mysterious power by giving birth to two. With the Zulus the belief is that the husband will die or otherwise suffer should both children live; and to obviate this difficulty it was customary, and still is in the remoter and less civilised districts, to suffocate the weaker of the twain—in the case of male and female, the former—before it had well commenced to live. Thanks, however, to a rigorous enforcement of the law in all cases where infanticide can be proved, this ghastly custom has now almost been stamped out; but habits and beliefs, whether amongst us or savages, die hard.

Previous to making war, most South African natives and tribes issue instructions to their head 'medicine-man' to ascertain, by means of his supposed supernatural powers, whether or not the occasion is for them an auspicious one. The methods adopted by the witch-doctors to learn this vary, of course, in accordance with the customs and beliefs of the different tribes concerned, though, at the same time, a great family resemblance is recognisable in all such mystic and barbaric rites. It has been stated that, in regard to the recent outbreak of hostilities between the British and Boers, the Basutos—the hereditary foes of the Boers—acting up to their usual custom, consulted the fates as to the result. Before relating how this was done it is necessary to state that among the natives a red-skinned ox always represents the British, a white the Boers, while a black animal, as is natural, is the accepted symbol of all native races. Accordingly, a red and a

white bullock were caught and simultaneously flayed alive; and whilst incantations were being muttered by the 'medicine-men,' a huge concourse of people carefully watched the devoted animals as they writhed and groaned in their agony. It so chanced that the white-skinned ox outlived, by some few moments, its fellow-martyr; in consequence of which, forsooth! the Basutos maintain that the Boers will eventually prove the victors; and, being convinced on this point, these people have at present decided to preserve a strict neutrality, notwithstanding their intense hatred of the Boers, rather than fight on the losing side.

Could anything better illustrate the credulity and rank superstition of these natives than the above-narrated incident, particularly as they quite admit the fact that such a golden opportunity of wiping out old scores will in all probability never again occur? On the other hand, the Dutch must hail with unadulterated joy this determination of their old-time foes to remain inactive, well knowing from past experience what cruel, stubborn, and unrelenting antagonists the inhabitants of mountainous Basutoland make. But, for all this, it would be exceedingly impolitic of either camp to rest assured of the absolute neutrality of the Basutos; for who knows but that the native *savants* may institute fresh inquiries and discover that they have made a mistake as to who are to be the ultimate victors?

Let us now turn to something less gruesome and revolting. In common with the people of almost every uncivilised race the world over, the South African natives look upon lunatics and simpletons—no matter what their creed, colour, or nationality—with reverential awe, and would no more dream of intentionally maltreating or injuring such than they would of hurting a little child. This instinctive abhorrence of wounding a fellow-being more or less incapable of self-defence is ascribable to the deep-rooted belief that all such irresponsible individuals are in close contact with and under the direct protection of the Great Spirit. But with all their reverence for the village idiot, they seldom are able to refrain from perpetrating an occasional practical joke on the poor fellow. Great care is, however, exercised to avoid injuring the subject of their fun, as the following little episode, witnessed in Natal by the writer, will show:

A crowd of appreciative Kaffirs were one day viewing the ludicrous antics and gesticulations of a very ragged and very dirty native idiot, who, as soon as he had attracted sufficient attention, went on to graphically describe his many brave deeds in battle, hinted at his vast knowledge in witchcraft, and generally drew on his powers of imagination for the amusement and instruction of his dusky audience. At length one of the bystanders, growing impatient and eager for greater

excitement, surreptitiously struck from the woolly pate of the poor half-witted creature the battered old silk hat which he was proudly wearing. A yell of applause greeted this development of the proceedings; while the hat was picked up, carefully brushed, and politely returned to the owner by one of the laughing Kaffirs. With a glance full of contempt and indignation, the unfortunate butt again donned his hat, but only to find that before it had been two seconds on his head it was again describing a parabola through the air. Time and again the hat was knocked off, but each time graciously returned by a spectator. At last, however, the poor owner of the topper, turning sharply, managed to catch one of his tormentors *in flagrante delicto*. With a quick grab he laid hold of the Kaffir's arm, and then set about administering a sound thrashing to the culprit with the flexible *sjabok* he held in his hand. The native took his flagellation stoically, and never once attempted to retaliate, nor even appealed to the onlookers for assistance; perhaps, indeed, he knew that it would be futile so to do. At the conclusion of the thrashing the recipient remarked, as he lugubriously rubbed his aching limbs, that though there might be some grounds for doubt as to the mental balance of the proprietor of the tall hat, he personally entertained none whatsoever respecting the perfect development of his friend's biceps!

In common with many of otherwise widely divergent opinions, the Zulus to some extent believe in the transmigration of spirits, owing to which they refuse to slay any snake, no matter how venomous, that may have wandered into the precincts of their places of abode. Such intruders are invariably accorded the greatest respect, being looked upon as deceased relatives, in the shape of serpents, harmlessly revisiting the scene of their one-time human form. But these same natives have not the slightest compunction in summarily putting to death any reptiles they may meet with at a distance from human habitations, such not being regarded in the light of possible brothers or sisters, fathers or mothers.

Appropos of snakes, it might be mentioned that Kaffirs affirm that no serpent can die, even though it be beheaded or beaten into a pulp, before the setting of the sun. This peculiar belief is shared by many Boers, while even some of the more superstitiously inclined British colonists also give it credence. Doubtless the muscular contractions of the reptile after death are responsible in a great measure for the prevalence of this idiotic belief, and in the case of ignorant Kaffirs it can be condoned; but that intelligent Europeans should credit any animal with such a miraculous tenacity of life is almost past understanding.

The Zulu custom of disembowelling fallen foes is now pretty generally known. Few are aware,

however, that such mutilation is not practised on account of innate cruelty, but in order to liberate the spirits of the deceased warriors. It is maintained that if the slayer inadvertently omit to perform this last act of charity he will be haunted and eventually driven into his grave by the insulted ghost of his victim.

The following is a quaint custom: After a battle all the surviving warriors are carefully dosed with *muti* (medicine) brewed from herbs by the witch-doctors of the tribe. This is to purify and fortify them against any sinister designs on their welfare that may be entertained by the spirits of their slain enemies.

A pleasing feature in the character of the Zulu is his generosity and willingness to share with his immediate friends and companions any of the good things of life that may happen to come his way. Frequently the writer, in order to test the dispositions of various natives, has purposely chosen one Kaffir out of a number, and, without permitting the remainder to observe, has presented the favoured individual with some article of confectionery, such as a piece of cake, a few chocolates, or a handful of biscuits. Never once, however, has he noticed a Kaffir secrete his treasures from his comrades, although every opportunity for so doing was given. No; the recipient, in every case, after profuse expressions of thanks, invariably shared whatever edibles he had obtained equally with all his companions, in many cases leaving the merest 'bite' for his own delectation.

But this excellent principle of share and share alike is sometimes extended beyond its proper limits, and often sadly overdone, as housekeepers in the colonies know to their cost. Unless all eatables are kept under lock and key, a mistress soon discovers that her particular kitchen Kaffir is regaling all his chums and relations with the best the house provides; and when accused of giving away what does not belong to him, he does not seem to think he has been guilty of any very serious misdemeanour. In fact, he feels aggrieved at exception having been taken to so minute a detail. It must be borne in mind that it is only where *skoff*, as all food is called by the natives, is concerned that he is unable to distinguish between *meum* and *tuum*; otherwise he is, as a rule, honestly personified.

One word in conclusion. Many people seem to think that the Zulus have no religious belief whatsoever. This is a mistake, for there is no doubt that some form of a future state is implicitly believed in, although the natives do not themselves appear very clear about the matter. Nevertheless, the existence of a Good and an Evil Spirit is acknowledged by every one of these merry, good-natured, and intelligent members of the human family.



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THE PARSON'S LETTER-BAG.



TIME—a winter evening; place—a village schoolroom; occasion—a lecture by a clerical friend on the General Post-Office and its working. At the close I was, of course, able to move the usual 'hearty vote of thanks,' for he had given a really interesting sketch of a great national institution. But I fear I did not quite follow him in his warm praises of Rowland Hill and the incalculable benefits which the Post-Office confers upon us all; for there are moments when the contents of my letter-bag demand all my patience, and make me just a shade sceptical of the commonly received doctrine. What with general directories, local directories, and clerical directories, it is so easy to find me out, and so many people think it worth their while to, that I feel myself almost persecuted by the unflinching attentions of the post-man; and there are even times when familiarity with his ministrations tends to produce its well-known result. In some of these matters, no doubt, I am only a sufferer in common with most of my fellow-men; others are the special privilege of clerics.

First, then, come the prospectuses; and they do come, plenty of them. The benevolence of all manner of titled and dignified capitalists is simply astonishing; and the wealth they are anxious to pour into my lap is fabulous—perhaps in more senses than one. Only they one and all begin by wanting some of my money in the first place! Sometimes it sounds very like, 'Just to show your confidence, you know.' But my confidence has had some very cruel shocks; and many of these fascinating documents now go to their doom unopened. It might have been better for me had they all done so.

Then follow the circulars on every conceivable subject, as it seems to me, that is capable of being advertised or recommended. Most wonderful tea and cocoa, with occasionally a sample enclosed that I may make trial of its merits, and sometimes reduced terms if I will purchase largely. Patent medicines with marvellous powers and infallible efficacy; and here also a sample is kindly provided! Why will people foolishly persist in dying when they can be cured so certainly and so cheaply of almost 'all the ills that flesh is heir to'? But more pleasant topics are touched on, and in the most persuasive manner. Beautiful bells, handsome organs—especially American organs—and fine clocks with mechanical chimes, all appeal to my imagination and tantalise my poverty. Various enterprising tailors, too, are very anxious to adorn my outer man, about which I admit I am deplorably careless; their suggestions as to what is most correct and becoming in clerical attire have almost a touch of rebuke or satire in

them—for me. But some of these gentlemen evidently have large faith in human nature, for they send me 'instructions for self-measurement.' Now, if 'the man who is his own lawyer has a fool for his client,' what will be the condition of the country parson wearing a suit for which he has *measured himself*? Had he not almost better go with Gulliver to Laputa, and be fitted with a coat by the aid of quadrant and sextant? I am not too particular about my millinery—far from it, my wife says; but it certainly would require more courage than I possess to go about in garments for the fit, or *misfit*, of which I was personally responsible! Not to be able to grumble at one's tailor! No; 'the line must really be drawn somewhere.'

The number of coal-merchants and coal-agents who compete for my custom is embarrassing. How can they all manage to get a living? Or do they accomplish the feat? The drapers, too, favour me with most elaborate lists and captivating illustrated appeals; sometimes even with patterns of fabrics which I do not in the least understand, but which I must assume to be very admirable and excellent, or of course these worthy men would not say so. I used to turn over all such documents at once to the *placens uxor*; but I regret to say that this led to so many appeals, and such pitiful statements about 'nothing to wear,' that I have quietly discontinued the practice. The wine-merchants also take a friendly interest in my table and my health. There are various palatable and nourishing wines which, if I will only drink them, will counteract the strain and pressure of clerical life, will strengthen my nerves, and preserve my digestion unimpaired to a healthy and vigorous old age. Then there is wine for sacred uses—the *only* wine that should ever be so employed, according to my advisers. And the last of the circulars on this subject has a somewhat authoritative tone; it presents to my notice an unfermented and non-intoxicating wine for sacred purposes, and gives me to understand that the gravest responsibilities will attach to any disregard of this intimation.

I am invited to furnish my modest dwelling as completely and elegantly as I please, and on the most reasonable terms; several firms or companies are anxious to do this for me, and each of them, it seems, will do it more reasonably and expeditiously than the others. I and my belongings can be removed anywhere at the shortest notice—also by a variety of agencies. Nor does the vigilant care of some of these unknown friends cease even with life. Some years ago the blinds were drawn down in my house for several days, and during this time there arrived a variety of sketches and prices of stone memorials

to mark the final resting-place. But the *ne plus ultra* of advertising must surely have been reached when I received an extremely neat note, very well written on tinted paper in a rather elegant feminine hand, and strongly perfumed, to inform me that Mr Blank, a neighbouring tradesman, had 'a regular supply of excellent sausages from the country three times a week,' and respectfully solicited my custom.

These various communications have one point in their favour, and to a busy man it is a very strong one—you need not answer them; and in many cases you will certainly be better off if you don't. But those long envelopes with official seals and inscriptions—they are quite of another order, and cannot be played with by any means. Some demand returns; others are from various commissioners, or from 'My Lords' who so kindly interest themselves in education, or from their various deputies; but as to the purport of all this somewhat elaborate and laborious correspondence, discretion counsels complete silence. Still one may say, without violating confidence, that it often adds a fair and sometimes a heavy item to the day's work.

Then come the appeals for help or charity. What *do* these good people take me for? Cræsus, Midas, and Mæcenæ, or, to come to later times, Peabody, Astor, and Rothschild—all rolled into one, surely—to judge from the number and urgency of their requests. Will I subscribe to this, that, and the other—to all the societies, funds, and associations under the sun, as I am sometimes tempted to put it to myself? Now, the value of my living is not an entire secret, nor is it one of the great 'prizes' of my profession; but perhaps I am credited with large private means; at any rate I am assumed to be generous; but this does not in the least help me to find the money. But if I cannot give, perhaps I can help in other ways. Will I make collections on Sundays, or hold a meeting during the week, or both? Or will I allow the eloquent and energetic secretary to come and do these things for me, supporting the movement by my own presence and personal influence? My dear people, there are only fifty-two Sundays in the year, as a rule; and of these, local objects and certain universally accepted claims have already bespoken a good share. Then we *must* have a certain number for our own work; and of those that remain, one can hardly help saying, 'What are they among so many?'

Private begging letters also come into the same class; and I am free to confess that, after many years' experience, I am still sometimes perplexed to distinguish genuine appeals from those of impostors. What tales of sorrow and want, struggles and suffering, some of these letters unfold! It is very hard to refuse; but if, on the other hand, you give at all freely, how quickly this is discovered, and you simply become a target

for every scoundrel to take a shot at. But when you cannot give, you are not allowed to forget that you have 'influence.' Your 'vote and interest,' at least, are requested. Will you help to get an orphan into an asylum? Yes, indeed, most gladly if possible. Only there are nineteen vacancies and seventy-six orphans; and, as you read the successive appeals, each one seems more deserving and distressing than the last. What is to be done—draw lots or take the first that applied? You finally make a selection, and send off your vote with a secret conviction that you are a very cruel man, having in effect said 'No' to a host of piteous appeals. Moreover, you have offended, or at least disappointed, the patrons of many of the other candidates, who are sure to think 'you certainly might have helped their case.'

You are also in great request for testimonials and certificates. Every one who has served with or under you, in any capacity, claims the right to your recommendation, at almost any distance of time, and with a view to any and every kind of employment. 'You knew me at —,' or, 'We were together at —,' is an unanswerable argument. And sometimes people whom you do not know at all, but whose *friends* knew you, still request help of this kind. Former servants, too, want characters, even if, like the legendary Irishman, they would probably 'do better without one.' Various good people, more or less qualified, have established schools, and wish to refer parents of possible pupils to you; these requests are sometimes very embarrassing. Certificates from registers you of course expect to furnish as required; but occasionally you are invited to a sort of 'general search,' with very incomplete data to guide you.

Miscellaneous correspondence 'crowns the edifice.' Some remarks of yours in a recent sermon require to be explained, and perhaps vindicated. Another discourse has been much appreciated, and the loan of the manuscript, or some notes, would greatly oblige. Can you recommend a book which will dispose of all sorts of religious difficulties, and reply to the latest attacks upon the faith? Or, better still, can you give your correspondent a summary of the defence, stated in your own clear and pointed way? Why do you not preach oftener on some given subject in which many good people are just now greatly interested? Can you not give a course of lectures, dealing thoroughly with—&c. Will you please to avoid special subjects entirely, and always deal with wider aspects of truth possessing general interest? Will you publish a given sermon? By this, as experience may have taught you, you will probably lose a little money, and may also bring the critics down upon you.

Having duly attended to these various claims, I may now turn to my own private correspondence. I have still some friends left, thank Heaven; but I hope they do not measure my

affection by the number and length of my letters, or I shall soon count them on my fingers, and not require all of those. My children, bless them! like to hear from me, and are goodness itself in excusing the rarity of their letters from home. Births, marriages, and deaths in the circle of my acquaintance call from time to time for letters which must not, especially from me, be too brief and formal. Letters of advice, and sometimes letters asking for it, must also be written. At times one has to endeavour to relieve religious melancholy, to minister to the mind diseased, and I have had some letters the writer of which was evidently insane. Anonymous letters are, happily, few and far between. Should they appear to be taking a malignant or scurrilous turn, the waste-paper basket is handy, and large; better still, perhaps, the study fire.

My readers may rest satisfied that among the penalties of an official position, even if humble, is a correspondence the extent, variety, and pressing character of which are often very imperfectly

realised, and constitute a heavy addition to the responsibilities of life. A wild thought has sometimes crossed my mind—to pocket a clean collar and a tooth-brush, grasp my trusty umbrella, and, having seen that something still remained in my purse, start off for a walk that should last a week; staying at country inns, and sending home post-cards to prevent anxiety as to my welfare, with the strictest injunctions that no letters should be sent after me. Visions of breezy downs, green woodlands, shady lanes, rippling streams, wild flowers, and music of the birds float before me as I plod away at my desk. A week without letters—it is 'too good to be true!' Then comes the second thought—prudent, necessary, but rather dismal—what a stack I should find on my table awaiting my return! However should I fetch up the arrears? For it is among the peculiar experiences of life—with me, at any rate—that the attempt to take even a short holiday seems to galvanise my correspondents into a most troublesome activity.

THE MONTH: SCIENCE AND ARTS.

COAST-LINE PROTECTION.



It is well known that in many places round our coasts the sea is constantly nibbling away at the land, encroaching in some places at such a rate that in the memory of living persons wide reaches of land have altogether disappeared. On rocky coasts the action is so imperceptible that it may be neglected; but where the soil is friable, the constant attack of the sea is a matter of serious moment to land-owners and occupiers in the vicinity. At present there is no authority to take note of impending danger from this cause; and as a rule no expert advice is sought until a building is in actual jeopardy or a tract of land has been suddenly submerged. Mr Allanson-Winn, a member of the Society of Engineers, did well to call attention to the need of some public department whose duty it should be to make reliable records of the changes taking place in our coast-line; and his paper read before the recent meeting of the British Association is worthy of earnest attention. It is almost certain that, as he claims, a large saving in the future would result from the adoption of the remedies he suggests.

ARTIFICIAL INDIGO.

Eighteen years ago Professor Bayer discovered how the valuable vegetable dye, indigo, could be built up in the laboratory synthetically; and this discovery, followed by improvements in the pro-

cess, has led to the production of artificial or 'synthetic' indigo on such a large scale that the natural indigo industry is threatened with extinction. This advance of science falls terribly hard upon the indigo-planters of Behar in Northern India, where hundreds of thousands depend upon the growth of indigo for their daily bread; and the rivalry of the chemists' production is likely to lead to something like a public calamity. Those interested in the natural product assert that the synthetic indigo cannot compete with it in permanence; but careful tests show that this contention cannot be maintained. The new indigo, while possessing all the good qualities of the old, is preferred by dyers because it is more constant in its composition than that which comes from the Behar planters.

BALLOONS IN WARFARE.

Preparations for war in South Africa include the provision of several captive balloons and the apparatus wherewith to make hydrogen gas to fill them. Each balloon is furnished with eight photographic cameras pointing in different directions, so that when the pictures are developed and pieced together the General in command will have at his disposal a complete panorama of the country in which he is operating. This is expected to be of special value in South Africa, where bush and hills hide much from the observer on *terra firma*, and where ambuscade and guerilla tactics are the recognised forms of warfare. Military ballooning may be said to be on its trial in the

Transvaal; and it is a matter for regret that it is a system which so much depends for its success on the caprices of the weather.

THE FEATHERED POST.

The carrier-pigeon—the most ancient representative of wireless telegraphy—is probably employed to a greater extent to-day than ever before in the world's history. It has been demonstrated more than once that these wonderful messengers can cross the wide surface of the Atlantic Ocean with safety, and now the useful birds are in regular service on the steamers of the trans-Atlantic company which run between Havre and New York. It is often a matter of the most urgent importance to be able to communicate with the shore. We can easily recall many instances in which a broken shaft has so delayed a steamer that much anxiety has existed as to her fate—
anxiety which would have been at once allayed by a reassuring message by pigeon-post. The system is open to any passenger who will go to the trouble of writing a post-card. These cards are reduced to tiny dimensions by means of photography, and the pigeon carries the film bearing the reduced messages in a quill beneath its wing. Upon arrival at its home, the messages are despatched to their destinations by post or wire. This system of communication between ship and shore is likely to become universal.

THE SAFETY OF RAILWAY TRAVELLING.

The risks of railway travelling are much exaggerated, a reflection of the old times when a man thought it necessary to make his will before undertaking the coach journey from, say, Edinburgh to London. Now we travel the same distance in hours instead of days, and think little of speeding along the lines at a mile a minute. That travelling at this rate is not accompanied by a tithe of the dangers which lurked around the old coaching system is easily capable of proof; but an interesting piece of evidence on the subject was recorded the other day, in the retirement of a North-Western engine-driver after fifty years' constant travelling. Mr Thomas Beck is now seventy-four years of age, and has travelled on his engine, during the past half-century, more than three million miles. This is equal in distance to one hundred and twenty voyages round the world, or to twelve excursions between the earth and the moon.

THE NEW CONSUMPTION CURE.

Some interesting facts are recorded in a recent report of the Hospital for Consumption at Hampstead, London, where the open-air system has been established since last January. The number of patients treated up to the end of September was

one hundred and eighty-three, and they are accounted for as follows: 43·7 per cent. were cured and returned to their work, 32·3 per cent. were distinctly improved, 7·6 per cent. slightly improved, 4·3 per cent. received no benefit, and 3·9 per cent. died. This is altogether a remarkable result, seeing that only a short time ago phthisis was regarded, except by quacks, as incurable. It is a common occurrence, we are told, for patients to enter the Hampstead hospital with all the usual indications of the malady, and to leave a few weeks later with the symptoms abated, and with an increase of many pounds in their weight. The medical officers in most cases keep up a correspondence with discharged patients, and they report that in cases where the improvement has been marked, and the necessary hygienic principles are properly carried out, there are no signs of any relapse.

MODERN BRANDY.

The Royal Institute of Public Health, recently assembled in congress at Blackpool, discussed, among other subjects, that of brandy; and according to the evidence of experts most of the French cognac which finds its way to this country does not owe its origin to the grape. The definite statement was made that 'the new kind of brandy did not fulfil the hopes based on the old-fashioned liquor ordered for patients by medical men.' Facts and figures are stubborn things, and a glance at the statistics available show that in the past year France produced only forty thousand hectolitres of alcohol made from wine—that is, real brandy—while she exported to this country above eighty-thousand hectolitres of brandy, so called; to say nothing of the two hundred thousand she sent to other countries, and the two millions she herself consumed. To put the matter in another way, the natural product was multiplied fifty-seven times by the aid of art. The art appears to consist in coaxing alcohol from corn, molasses, beet-root, wine lees, apples and pears, and 'other materials,' and the *phylloxera* which twenty years ago ruined so many of the vintages is credited with having founded the new industry.

BEES AND THEIR HONEY.

At the Grocers' Exhibition at the Agricultural Hall, London, which closed in October, a department was devoted to English honey, and many improvements in its production were demonstrated. The old method of letting the bees do as they like, and killing them when their work is finished, crushing the comb, and draining the honey through coarse cloth, has given way to a far more scientific system. The lives of the insects are preserved, and they are induced to construct the comb in square sections. This comb is unsealed by shaving off the waxen ends of the cells by special apparatus,

and after the sweet contents have been extracted the empty comb is once more returned to the hive to be refilled by the busy workers. The modern plan is based on the observation that the bees can make honey much quicker than they can build the cells to hold it.

REMEDY FOR THE LOCUST PLAGUE.

The *German African Gazette* is responsible for the statement that a Mr Cooper, of Richmond, Natal, has discovered a new method of destroying swarms of locusts. The plan consists in catching and smearing a few of the locusts with 'locust fungus,' a preparation which is cultivated in the Bacteriological Institute at Grahamstown, Cape Colony. The insects are then allowed to return to the swarm, which they infect with what is presumably a fatal disease. The same preparation applied on damp soil in places where it is known locusts will swarm leads to their complete destruction. Twenty swarms are said to have been destroyed in this manner. Although this statement is open to doubt, it may be remembered that a celebrated bacteriologist once proposed to deal with the rabbit-pest in Australia in much the same way. It is quite possible that a similar remedy might be found for the malarial mosquito, for it is only by such means that its extirpation could be brought about.

WIRELESS TELEPHONY.

Marconi's wireless telegraph has already a rival in the system of telephonic communication with which Sir William Preece has been experimenting at Carnarvon. At the south end of Menai Strait, near Llanfaglan Church, four high poles have been erected; at some distance away other poles have been set up; and still farther off, at Belan Fort, is a high pole supporting a coil of wire, which finds its terminal in deep water. Between these points communication is easily carried on without intermediary wires, a series of taps at one station being very plainly heard by means of the telephone at the other. It need hardly be pointed out that by means of such taps the Morse alphabet can be employed, and words conveyed from point to point with the rapidity of the ordinary telegraphic apparatus. In point of speed, therefore, the system is better than Marconi's wireless telegraph; but as yet the sounds are not so distinct as is thought desirable.

MACHINERY *versus* HAND-LABOUR.

Cassier's Magazine, which devotes itself to engineering subjects, calls attention to the steady growth of machinery employment with the corresponding reduction of hand-labour, and points out how both in Europe and America enterprise

has profited to a remarkable degree by the change. As an example of the saving effected, the case of the English blast-furnaces is quoted, where pig-iron casting-machines have led to a saving of about twopence per ton. This does not seem much; but a saving of that amount on the whole of the pig-iron produced throughout Great Britain last year would represent an economy of seventy thousand pounds. It was further pointed out that the introduction of mechanical applications to the mining and quarrying industries might have a remarkable economical effect, inasmuch as the saving of only a penny per ton in the cost of the limestone quarried in 1898 would represent a little nest-egg of fifty thousand pounds, while a similar reduction in the cost of the coal raised during the same period would mean a lump sum of one hundred thousand pounds. Never was the wise policy of taking care of the pence more strongly put, and the matter cannot be too strongly urged upon British manufacturers in view of increasing foreign competition.

A METROPOLITAN SUBWAY.

We are all accustomed to hear of secret passages beneath old castles and churches, and most ruins have some tradition of the kind. But few persons were aware, before Mr Threlfall called attention to it the other day, that beneath the busy streets of London there is an iron tube some four feet in diameter and more than two miles long—which was at one time used, on the pea-shooter principle, for the despatch of mails between the General Post-Office and some of its sub-stations. The scheme was abandoned because of the heavy expense involved in working; but the tube still remains, and Mr Threlfall suggests that it might once more be utilised by the Post-Office. Instead of the old pneumatic arrangement, he proposes to employ electric traction—an electric railway, in fact, that should be devoted to the carriage of mails and parcels only. The matter has already been brought before the officials concerned; but it is a matter for consideration whether the plan—in view of the small distance covered—could economically displace the horses and carts at present in use for the same duty.

MOTOR VEHICLES.

It seems to be part of the sturdy Briton's character that he should be conservative in his suspicion of new-fangled devices; anyhow, he is extremely slow to adopt inventions and discoveries which other nations are willing at once to assimilate. The habit has its drawbacks; but it has the pretty constant advantage that we leave the great expense and trouble of experiment to others, and profit much in the end by their labours. It has been especially so with the motor-car

business, which, although so popular in France and other countries, has been so slowly taken up here that the sight of a motor-car in our streets still attracts attention and excites remark. A new era has, however, recently dawned for the Metropolis, where motor-omnibuses are now in regular use. It remains to be seen whether these mechanically propelled road-vehicles will so familiarise the public with their use as to cause a greatly increased employment for them. One of the difficulties in the way is to familiarise horses, as well as human beings, with the appearance of the new vehicles.

DESTRUCTION OF SMALL BIRDS.

The question of the slaughter of small birds, to whose labours in keeping down insect pests the agriculturist owes so much, again and again comes up for discussion. Some good has been done in persuading ladies not to buy bird's plumage for the decoration of their headgear; but the birds have other enemies besides the milliners. A correspondent of the *Times*, who dates his letter from Padua, complains of what he rightly calls the grievous sights to be seen in the market-places of many Italian towns. In these towns hundreds and hundreds of singing birds, many of them migrants from the British Isles, are daily sold for the dinner-table: woodpeckers, kingfishers, goldfinches, wrens, robins, larks, and blackbirds; indeed, all the songsters of our hedgerows are found there for sale. The Italian law forbids this slaughter of small birds, but it goes on nevertheless; and until the people refuse to eat such fare, as all right-minded people will, the mischief must continue. Unfortunately the right-minded persons do not form the majority, either in Italy or anywhere else.

THE FOOD OF SOLDIERS AND SAILORS.

Much difference of opinion has existed as to the best kind of ration for soldiers and sailors in tropical climates; and in order to get the best opinion on the subject a prize of a hundred dollars, or a medal of that value, has been offered by Dr Louis L. Seaman for the best paper on the subject. The title of the paper is to be 'The Ideal Ration for an Army in the Tropics,' and the competition is open to all commissioned medical officers of the American army and navy, regular and volunteer. The prize is offered through the Military Service Institution of America, and all papers must be submitted by the 1st of March next year.

A NEW CYCLE LOCK.

Messrs Tranter & Co., of Trowbridge, have introduced a clever little device, which will be

welcomed by cyclists, under the name of the 'cyclok.' It can be affixed with great facility to the steering-head of any machine, and adds only one ounce to the weight which the rider has to carry. The chief feature of the appliance is a bolt with a milled head, a quarter-turn of which will lock the steering in the ordinary way; but a complete locking can be effected by giving the bolt another quarter-turn. From this fully locked condition the machine cannot be released without the use of a key, so that the introduction of the new device will not be applauded by the light-fingered fraternity who devote their attention to the abstraction of bicycles.

'WIRELESS WONDERS.'

Under this somewhat sensational heading some of the experiments with wireless telegraphy in connection with the British Association meeting at Dover were described. But there was absolutely nothing new introduced, and the experiments were, as usual, confined to the Channel. Communication was made with the South Foreland, 'through,' it was stated, four miles of cliff; but expert opinion is divided whether the electric waves do not pass over, rather than penetrate, an obstruction of this kind. Special importance was attached to the fact that a message was received from Boulogne in three minutes, as compared with 'invariably not less than an hour' occupied in getting a cable message from Boulogne or Calais to Dover. On the face of the matter, this is rather crushing for the cable, because it is difficult to get the newspaper-reading public to understand that there is all the difference in the world between pre-arranged experiments, specially laid out for success, and ordinary, everyday practical working. If a cable could be cleared of its ordinary traffic, and operators were seated at either end ready to transmit a single message, it could probably be got through in even less than three minutes; it being the number and length of the messages, and not the passage of the electric current, which occupies time. If a comparison is to be made with cables, let us suppose that half-a-score, or even half-a-dozen, Marconis are trying to signal across the Channel at the same time—would not babel be the result? The drawback to 'wireless telegraphy,' so called, is that it requires a monopoly of the sea, and that is rather a large order. But you may lay as many cables as you like across the Channel, and each may contain as many wires, and you may be 'speaking' to half the capitals of Europe at the same time, and there would not be the least misunderstanding or confusion. This it is which constitutes the advantage of tying the electric current to a wire. The public has made up its mind not to be instructed in this matter, and has been throwing away its cable shares to the tune of some millions, on the chance of cables becoming useless and antiquated.

Well might the newly-appointed electrician to the Post-Office exclaim, as he did to an interviewer the other day, 'People seem to have gone wild over wireless telegraphy!' The Americans have taken the matter more philosophically, for while

the *New York Herald* admits that its Marconi messages in connection with the yacht races worked perfectly, it adds: 'No practical advantage is apparent, the accustomed methods being quite as good.'

FENLAND COLLIERIES.



SAfternoon fades into evening on a late autumn day a peculiar note, almost of sadness, strikes a visitor for the first time to one of those hoary old villages which dot the borders of the Fenland district of south-west Norfolk. The old church, towering gray and silent up into the murky air; the cottage doors close shut, with suggestions of inmates indicated by shadows thrown fitfully by the flickering firelight on the drawn blinds—shadows mostly moving round and near some central object, doubtless the tea-table, waiting the husband's return from the rapidly darkening fields and homesteads. These features produce in one an almost melancholy impression of homelessness, which happily is not of long duration when once 'mine inn' opens its hospitable doors, and welcomes the wanderers with blazing fire and good cheer.

In passing down the almost deserted streets—for the children have been home from school a good hour—one cannot have failed to notice a peculiarly pungent odour permeating the heavy autumnal atmosphere; and upon entering the cosy room and drawing near the cheerful blaze, the source of this wholesome pungency is at once discovered; for the fire which glows so cheerily on the hearth is fed with fuel locally obtained—that is to say, dug from the fen hard by. The peculiar odour impregnating the air arises from this 'turf'—as it is called here, not 'peat'—and is locally considered, perhaps with some amount of truth, a great preventive of chest attacks.

Nearly all these villages we have mentioned are situated on the shoulder of the high ground rising from and keeping sentry over the Fenland; and, should the morning be a bright one, a walk to the crest of the upland will show a considerable area of the land of dikes under panoramic conditions. The fen itself hardly ever receives justice when viewed from a distance, even in the summer. Under these circumstances a peculiarly sombre tint makes itself apparent in the herbage, and a grayness in the foliage. But down there among the ditches—drains they call them—with the sun shining brightly, and the breeze softly caressing the waving ramparts of sedge, reeds, cat's-tails, and moisture-loving plants of all kinds that rise tier above tier from some neglected drain—under these conditions, the

prodigality of natural beauty is a revelation. Here in this overgrown ditch is a creamy, swaying mass of meadow-sweet, foaming high over the heads of the other and lesser growths, its almond-like perfume floating afar on the breeze.

The birds like the fen, too. Here they are to be seen in myriads; at times many species of great rarity. These large gatherings are doubtless attracted by the varied insect-life thronging every leaf and bloom.

But we are not here botanising or bird-hunting, but to see how and whence the 'turf' is obtained which forms such an important item in the economy of the district.

Large areas of the fens have a thick substratum of blue clay or gault. This, when raised and spread over the land, with which it becomes amalgamated by frost and mechanical means, is not only the most natural but also the most efficacious fertiliser of this class of land. The 'turf' obtained from above this clay is the hardest and best. Unfortunately the layer is a thin one, more frequently but one turf (twelve inches) deep. The next best locality, with no clay beneath, though not yielding quite so good a quality, shows a stratum sometimes three turfs deep. There is another class of fenland which yields no 'turf' at all, but consists (till black, slimy depths are reached) of nothing but loose, friable black earth of poor fertility.

The operation of 'turfing' is carried on during spring and early summer. The locality where digging is to commence having been fixed upon, the first operation is to clear from a space one yard wide and the length of the intended turf-pit the loose top-soil called 'moor' to the depth of ten or twelve inches, when the turf is reached, which has a soapy kind of solidity. A special tool is now brought into requisition, known as a 'becket'; this tool is a kind of wooden spade, shod with a steel cutting-edge, and gauged, by a slip of steel at right angles to the blade, to the correct width and thickness of the brick or 'hod' of turf required; the length of each 'hod' is the depth of the spade (twelve inches). Nine of these bricks are taken from the whole width of the pit (thirty-six inches). As they are dug they are deposited on the ground beside the open pit, where a regular wall is built of them, with interstices left between them for the admission of air and sunshine to dry them.

After lying in this wall for a week or two, according to the weather, they are turned, and as soon as thoroughly dry are either carted home to be deposited in sheds, or are stacked up on the land in large squares, with the tops well protected; as, if they get wet after being once dried, they break and crumble very easily, and much waste is occasioned by handling them.

Turf-diggers frequently have their operations not only hindered but entirely stopped by the numerous portions of long-submerged trees which lie deep down in the heart of the 'turf' stratum. Many of the gate-posts in the locality are made from logs of oak unearthed in this manner, the wood being in splendid preservation and extremely hard. One peculiarity attaching to these buried trees, and which affords much scope for scientific speculation, is that they all lie in one direction, much as though some terrific tempest-blast had smitten them to the earth at one and the same moment. Other odds and ends of antiquarian interest have been found.

Many of these turf-diggers and others hire a small piece of this fenland, which not only yields litter and coarse fodder for pony or donkey, but keeps the cottage fireside bright and cheerful; and the contemplation of the out-house, packed to its tiles with these black bricks, brings many a smile to the mother's

lips that would not otherwise be there, as she thinks of the tiny hands and faces that will not seek in vain its warmth and brightness.

DEATH OF THE OLD YEAR.

Thy life is ebbing fast, thou aged Year!
This night that wintry sun of thine will set,
To rise no more. Thy days are told; and yet
It seems but yesterday thou didst appear!
But yesternight we watched, all silent, here,
The old Year's dying hours, while backward rolled
Its story, page by page; and now, behold!
Thy course is run. Even now thy moments wear
The fading hue of death. Farewell, old Friend!
Fain would we linger by thy side awhile,
And gather up thy mem'ries, one by one,
While, in the vacant chairs, dear faces smile
Upon us, as of old. But ever on,
Life's current bears us—swifter to the end!

M. C. C.

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